

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
5327 W. Washington Blvd.
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The Second Sunday after Christmas
January 3, 2010
Luke 2:25-40

"Salvation's Song"
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

Do you know that it is still Christmas? Now you might be thinking how can that be? We have just celebrated the beginning of the New Year. Many people are already taking down their Christmas decorations and packing things away. But we are still in the period of the twelve days of Christmas which continues until the Feast of the Epiphany this coming Wednesday, January 6th. Because Christmas came on a Friday this year, we actually have two Sundays in the calendar after Christmas. We cheated a little though, in that we observed St. John the Apostle last week and are using the readings for the First Sunday after Christmas this week on the Second Sunday. These readings give us an opportunity to consider the effect of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ upon our lives and upon the world.

The Scripture readings are well suited for this task this morning. They suggest the theme which will be the basis for our discussion: "Salvation's Song."

I. The Background

The Old Testament lesson is a reminder of the basis for the events of the Gospel for today. The Lord tells Moses to remind the people of Israel that all the firstborn are to be consecrated to the Lord and redeemed by Him in memory of the great act of the Lord in slaying the firstborn of Egypt and saving the firstborn of the children of Israel. From this came the custom of presenting the firstborn to the Lord at the temple. This is what took place on the 40th day after Jesus birth according to the Gospel lesson for this day.

The Epistle for this morning is also very fitting. St. Paul reminds the Colossians to let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts and to be thankful. Above all, let the word of Christ dwell in them richly as they sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness to God. There is our song which indeed is salvation's song. In the account of the presentation of Jesus in the temple, two of Israel's righteous and faithful citizens show forth the praise of God as they sing salvation's song.

II. Simeon

The Gospel of St. Luke calls our attention to Simeon this day. Simeon, note how he is described in the text, was "righteous and devout", "waiting for the consolation of Israel", "the Holy Spirit was upon him". What a picture of a pious God-fearing individual whose whole life was centered in the expectation of the appearance of the long-awaited Messiah. For this was the revelation which he had received from the Holy Spirit that it would be in his very lifetime that the Lord's Christ would come and he himself would see Him. On that

momentous day, the Spirit of God led him into the temple courts and there he was directed to Mary and Joseph as they brought the child Jesus there to do according to the law of Moses regarding a first born son and the purification of his mother.

And Simeon takes the child in his arms and sings salvation's song. He sings it in praise of God. He sings as he sees the fulfillment of God's promise to Him. For the Lord whom he sought suddenly came to His temple as the prophet Malachi foretold. He sings a song that we still sing, the *Nunc Dimittis* (after its Latin words) -- Lord, now let your servant go in peace, your words have been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people. A light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel." We will all sing this song at the conclusion of this service. Yes, here was the salvation of the world. It is interesting that Simeon can say, "my own eyes have seen thy salvation" for in the Hebrew he would have said, my eyes have seen "Jeshua" for the very name of Jesus, given him by the angel, is a reminder of the salvation which he would earn and offer to all people. How Mary and Joseph must have wondered at these words. Yet the words which followed were a reminder that there would be sorrow in the road that lay ahead. For as Simeon told his mother, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." Yes, the child he held in his arms would arouse great controversy and furor and hatred and animosity. The child would grow and become strong, he would be filled with wisdom, and the grace of God would be upon Him, but the road he would walk leads inevitably to the cross. For that cross is also an integral part of salvation's song. Without the cross there would not be any victory. Without the cross there would be no empty tomb. Without the cross the manger would mean nothing.

III. Anna

But Simeon is not the only person in the Gospel today. Anna is also there. Anna is also described as very devout, indeed she never left the temple precincts but worshipped there night and day, fasting and praying. Her whole life from the time when she was widowed at an early age had been given over to the Lord's service. It is possible to interpret the words of the text to mean as well that she was not just 84, but rather had lived eighty four years as a widow which would make her well over 100 years old. She also comes up to Mary and Joseph at that time and gives thanks to God. She joins in salvation's song and also witnesses to it to all who as the text says, "were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem." She willingly shared the hope that she had. She was a devout example of faithful service to the Lord. In her too, the words of Isaiah were fulfilled, "In the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult."

IV. Our Song

And that brings this text to us. Or rather, it asks the important question. Do we sing salvation's song? Indeed we should. We do if you consider the fact that the words of Simeon

are sung quite often as part of our communion liturgy. And what a better place to sing them than there. For after we have tasted and seen, after we have partaken of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, we truly can pray that God would dismiss us in his peace for our eyes have seen the salvation which he has prepared in the sight of every people. But we sing salvation's song in other ways as well. And that is the message of the Epistle for this day. Again, the words of St. Paul fit well for this Sunday after Christmas. He reminds us that as God's chosen people we are to clothe ourselves with "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." We should bear with one another and forgive one another. We should put on love which binds all the other virtues together. And above all, we should let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts since "as members of one body you were called to peace." How those words ring out on this Second Sunday after Christmas. The ageless story of God's peace in the child of Bethlehem has been heard again. The angels sang of that peace on the first Christmas night. The shepherds rejoiced to see it. Simeon could sing that he could now "depart in peace" for he had seen the salvation of God. In Christ there is perfect peace. In Christ is the answer to the despair, the hurt, the trouble of this world. In Christ is the peace that the world cannot give and the world can never understand. In Christ Jesus, our Lord, is peace. And in that peace is the song we sing. St. Paul continues, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." The songs we sing, the words we speak, should all most richly echo the words of Christ, the saving and powerful words which he has given us.

The window of opportunity which the Christian community is given every year is fast coming to an end. You don't hear many Christmas songs anymore unless they are the leftovers in the malls. The songs heard soon will not speak of "peace and love and hope above". There will no longer be references to the Child and his everlasting peace. The lights and trees and decorations will be put away. And tragically for many people, the baby Jesus will be packed away with the manger for another year and forgotten. At Easter time, you will not hear the stores filled with songs about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christmas is the one time it happens that the sacred does make inroads into our secular society. And for that we should be grateful. But we need to make good use of the opportunity. The songs sung at this time of the year need to be reinforced. We need to be the song for those around us that they might know of the continued love and presence of God. The child Jesus grew up. The man Christ Jesus gave himself as the ransom for the sins of the world. The Lord Jesus Christ is still the center of the church's song. For in him the song of salvation finds its very meaning. Help to spread the word!

O rejoice, ye Christians loudly,
For our joy has now begun
Wondrous things our God has done.
Tell abroad His goodness proudly,
Who our race has honored thus
That he deigns to dwell with us.
Joy, O joy, beyond all gladness,

Christ has done away with sadness!
Hence, all sorrow and repining,
For the Sun of grace is shining!

In Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God ...